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## PRESS RELEASE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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#### CONTACT INFORMATION:

Jennifer Jaeger, Community Services Director  
City of Rockford Human Services  
Phone: 815-962-6624  
Email: [jennifer.jaeger@rockfordil.gov](mailto:jennifer.jaeger@rockfordil.gov)

Cyndie Hall, Executive Director  
Neighborhood Network  
Phone: 815-967-4034  
Email: [cyndie.hall@rockfordil.gov](mailto:cyndie.hall@rockfordil.gov)

### *Planting the Seeds of Success Community Gardens* Introduction Meetings February 20<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>

**Rockford - Calling all community gardeners.** All parties interested in learning about or participating in the *Planting the Seeds of Success Community Gardens* should attend one of the following meetings:

- Monday, February 20<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 p.m.-7:30 p.m. at 1st Evangelical Covenant Church, 316 Wood Road, Rockford, 61107. The meeting will be in the lower level Junior High Room. Please enter from the south side of the church.
- Thursday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> from 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. or 6:00 p.m.-7:30 p.m. at the Ida Public Library, 320 North State Street, Belvidere, 61008-3299.
- Monday, February 27<sup>th</sup> from 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. at 555 North Church Street, Rockford, 61103. The meeting will be in Room NC115 East in the lower level (basement).

Topics to be discussed at the *Planting the Seeds of Success Community Gardens* meetings include:

- introduction to the *Planting the Seeds of Success Community Gardens*
- grant funding available
- education and training to be provided for gardeners
- guidelines, application and deadlines

A green thumb is not required to be a part of the community gardens; a major focus of the program is learning. “You don’t have to be an expert gardener as Extension staff and our Master Gardeners will work with participants to make their gardening experience positive”, stated Margaret Larson, County Director, University of Illinois Extension Jo Daviess, Stephenson and Winnebago Counties. “We are excited to be able to provide technical expertise and educational workshops, and we have master gardeners and other volunteers ready to help from planning through basic food preservation.”

Jennifer Jaeger, Community Services Director for City Human Services, explains that applications are being sought in Winnebago and Boone Counties from:

- neighborhoods, faith-based or other groups that are interesting in learning gardening skills and are willing to help their community by donating a portion of the produce to area pantries and other organizations serving those in need
- organizations that collaborate and include in their program education, nutrition, or expanded involvement and outreach to groups such as children, seniors, and veterans
- neighborhoods and other types of groups that will use the gardens as part of an effort to increase neighborhood and community vitality or unity
- neighborhood groups that are interested in participating in Farmer’s Markets and using proceeds to support neighborhood based activities such as block parties and cleanups that benefit the entire neighborhood

Participants are given the opportunity to work together to grow healthy food, but the program yields more than produce. “Through gardening, people don’t just learn how to grow vegetables. They also learn how to work together to solve problems. People will be working towards improving the health and vitality of our community”, stated Jennifer Jaeger.

Cyndie Hall, Executor Director of Neighborhood Network reports that she “has been pleased with the positive effect gardens have had on the neighborhoods by removing blight and empowering people” and explained that the program will continue to encourage close ties to neighborhoods in 2012.

In 2011, the *Planting the Seeds of Success Community Gardens* supported 43 gardens in two counties which were manned by both adult and youth volunteers, for an estimated 10,000 volunteer hours. All gardens contributed at least a portion of their produce to Plant a Row for the Hungry or to area food pantries, for a total donation of more than 10,050 pounds of vegetables.

Applications will be available at the meetings and must be submitted by March 8th. Note: These community gardens are funded by the City of Rockford Human Services Department and should not be confused with the rental garden plots available through the Rockford Park District.

For more information, please contact:

Cyndie Hall, Executive Director  
Neighborhood Network  
Phone: 815-967-4034  
Email: [cyndie.hall@rockfordil.gov](mailto:cyndie.hall@rockfordil.gov)

Christopher Greenwood  
City of Rockford Human Services  
Phone: 815-967-4039  
Email: [Christopher.greenwood@rockfordil.gov](mailto:Christopher.greenwood@rockfordil.gov)

*Planting the Seeds of Success Community Gardens is a collaborative project with the City of Rockford Human Services Department, Neighborhood Network, University of Illinois Extension-Jo Daviess, Stephenson and Winnebago Counties and volunteer Master Gardeners. Funding is partially provided through City of Rockford Human Services, Community Services Block Grant funds.*

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